Approved for Release: 2018/09/17 C05065984

Director of Central Intelligence

~~Top Secret~~ [redacted]

[redacted] 3.5(c) [redacted]

EO 13526 3.5(c) NR

National Intelligence Daily

Wednesday 23 June 1982

~~Top Secret~~

CPAS NID 82-146JX

[redacted] 3.5(c)

23 June 1982

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(2) ARGENTINA: New President

The naming of retired General Reynaldo Bignone as President was probably accomplished by the Army over the objections of the commanders of the Navy and Air Force. 3.5(c)

The Army, in a communique issued yesterday, claims the armed forces are united behind the decision. Other reports indicate, however, that although the Navy and the Air Force intend to remain in the junta, they have withdrawn from the day-to-day running of the country in protest over Army Commander in Chief Nicolaides's imposition of his candidate. Army generals who were largely responsible for former President Galtieri's ouster also are opposing Bignone. 3.5(c)

Before Bignone retired in December at 53, he served as Commander of the Military Institutes for one year, and he held the politically sensitive post of Secretary General of the Army from 1977 to 1980. The new President has good relations with political leaders and the press and favors continued military involvement in the government. 3.3(b)(1) 3.5(c)

Comment: Senior Army officers have been arguing since Galtieri's ouster that one of their own should complete the political reform begun by the Army in 1976. Army leaders probably believe that by retaining the presidency, the Army will be less vulnerable to recriminations--and possible purges--as reaction to the loss of the Falklands spreads. 3.5(c)

The withdrawal by the Navy and the Air Force preserves the trappings of the junta, enabling the Army to attempt to overcome the paralysis afflicting the government and to set new economic and political policies. Any such gains may be short lived, however, because criticism of Nicolaides's move by the other services will leave the regime little room to carry out the new policies. 3.5(c)

Civilians may withhold support because of the selection process and because of Bignone's identification with monetarist economic policy. They probably would work with discontented members of all three services. Second-echelon grumbling in the Army also could prompt additional shakeups. 3.5(c)

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